

LA PAZ COUNTY PORTION OF THE LA PAZ / MOHAVE LOCAL WORKFORCE INVESTMENT AREA

Geography

La Paz County is situated on the western border of Arizona sandwiched between Mohave County to the north and Yuma County to the south. In terms of jobs, the La Paz County economy comprises less than one-half of one percent of Arizona's economy. Approximately 50 percent of the county's labor force reside in the reservation portion of the county. Agriculture continues to remain an important component of the La Paz economy. However, the share of agricultural employment has been giving way to the fast growing industry of tourism. Economic activity in the county is centered in Parker, which supports primarily water-based recreation during the summer along the Colorado River north of Parker to the Parker Dam. Additional trade and services are provided at locations near freeway interchanges of Interstate 10, the principal transportation corridor from Phoenix to Los Angeles, especially at Quartzite and Ehrenberg. In the winter, Quartzite bustles with hundreds of additional temporary residents camped in recreational vehicles.

Population

According to the most recent official population figures, produced by the US Census Bureau, mid-year estimates show 19,715 people reside in La Paz County. This resident population accounts for less than .4 percent of the state of Arizona's total population. In the ten years since the 1990 census, La Paz County's population grew by 42.4 percent, or roughly 3.7 percent annually compared to the state as a whole which grew over 40 percent for the decade. Quartzite is the largest city in La Paz County with an estimated population of 3,354; Parker is second with an estimated population of 3,140.

Income

According to data from the Bureau of Economic Analysis from 1990 to 1999, local total personal income in La Paz County increased 48.6 percent compared to the State's nearly 90 percent. However, on a per capita basis, the gain of 38.6 percent was 7.7 percent below the State's growth of 46.3 percent. La Paz County per capita income was \$22,133 in 1999, about 87.9 percent of the state average, down from 92.8 percent in 1990. Average wage per job increased about 2 percent in 1999 to a level of \$23,567 – only 75 percent of the state's level.

Labor Force

The La Paz County labor force grew roughly 2 percent each year from 1995 to 2000. La Paz County employment figures grew faster at almost 2.4 percent per

year. This affected the unemployment rate downward from 10.3 percent in 1995 to 7.2 percent in 2000.

Employment

Total nonfarm employment in La Paz County averaged 6 percent average yearly growth from 1995-2000. The largest growth percentage (after government) occurred in the transportation, communication, & public utilities, which had average growth of 11 percent for the period. Government and trade make up 73 percent of La Paz County employment and registered impressive gains at 14.6 percent and 4.4 percent per year respectively. Manufacturing also gained over 7.6 percent each year for the period. The only industry to lose employment during the period was services at a rate of approximately 6 percent per year.

Growing and Declining

During the year 2000, the fastest growing industries in terms of job growth were hotels and motels (+272 jobs), government (+89 jobs), and automobile repair shops (+15 jobs). The industries showing the most employment contraction over the same period were bars and restaurants (-79 jobs), cotton, tobacco and sugar crops (-76 jobs), and heavy construction, except highway (-40 jobs). For further details see the enclosed tables.

Forecast

Research Administration is forecasting employment to grow 1.1 percent in PY 01-02 and another 2.6 percent in PY 02-03. Countywide unemployment is expected to decrease slightly from the PY 00-01 rate of 6.5 percent to 6.3 percent in PY 01-02 and afterwards to 6.2 percent in PY 02-03. Unemployment in the non-reservation areas is expected to fall from the PY 00-01 rate of 5.3 percent to 5.1 percent in PY 01-02 and then to 5.0 percent in PY 02-03.

Issues of Concern

- Low earnings per job growth

Source: Arizona Department of Economic Security, Research Administration, November 2001.